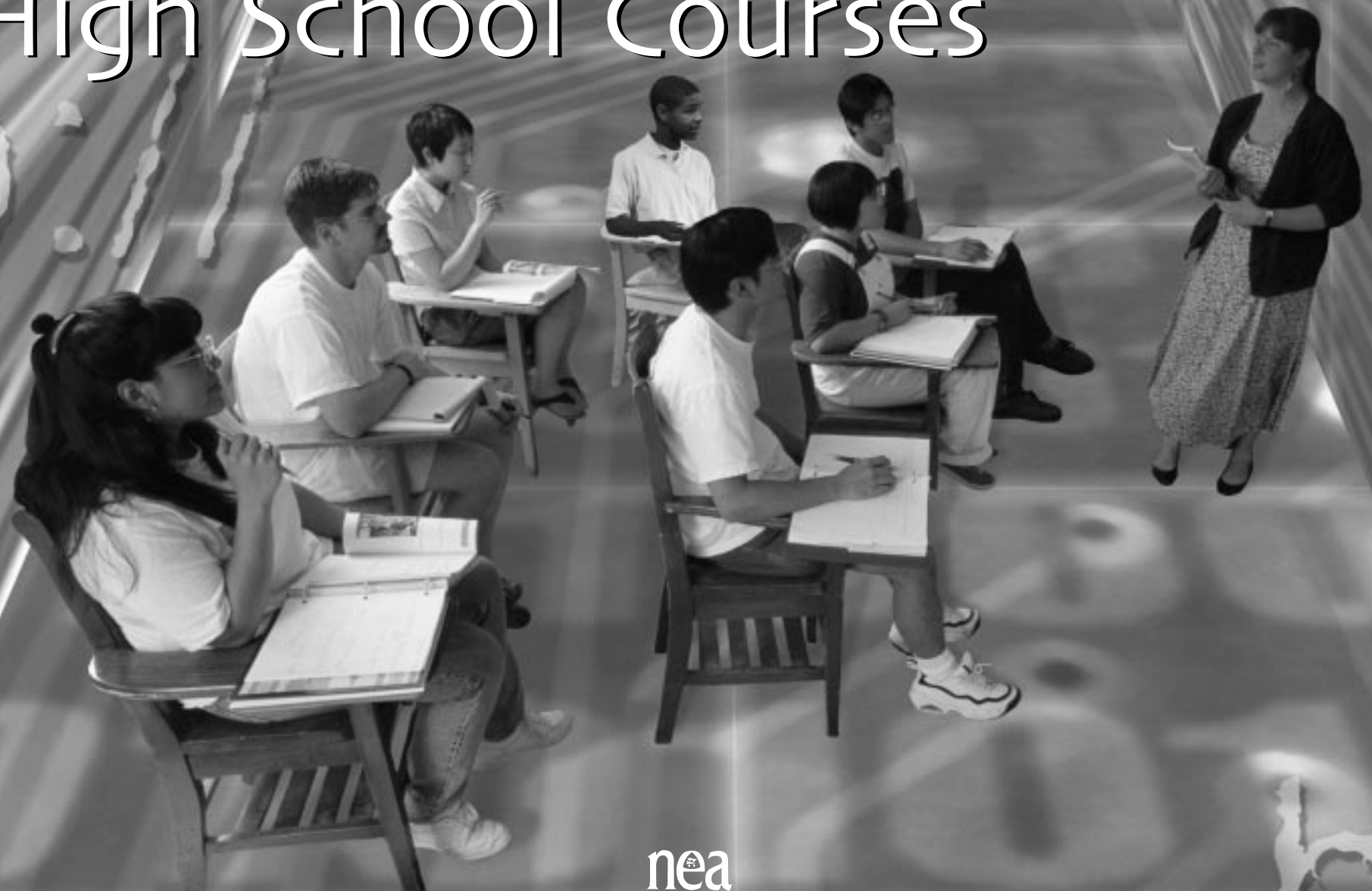


Guide to Online High School Courses



Guide to Online High School Courses
is a product of the:

National Education Association

Virtual High School, Inc.

and

American Association of School
Administrators

CNA Corporation

IBM Corporation

National Association of State Boards
of Education

National School Boards Association

Verizon Communications

Editor/Consultant: Kathleen Fulton

www.nea.org/technology/distanceed/highschool

Table of Contents

SECTION I	1
Assessing Online High School Courses	1
Background	1
Why focus on high school courses?	1
Why are standards needed for online learning?.....	2
Goals for this Document	3
SECTION II	5
Checklists for Various Constituencies	5
Questions for Policymakers.....	5
Questions for Online Teachers	7
Questions for Managers and Administrators of Online Courses	
Questions for Parents/Guardians	9
Questions for Students	9
A User's Guide to Online Courses.....	11
Introduction	11
Curriculum	13
Instructional Design	14
Teacher Quality	16
Student Roles	18
Assessment	19
Management and Support Systems	20
Technical Infrastructure	23
References and Resource List	25
Acknowledgements	26

SECTION I

Assessing Online High School Courses

Background

Information technology is promoting fundamental changes in how we teach and learn. Barriers of time and place are tumbling as technology offers new choices and opportunities for students and educators. Over the last 20 years or more, American schools have embraced distance learning tools to enhance students' educational opportunities. Satellite, microwave, cable, and broadcast television first gave students access to courses not otherwise available in their home schools. More recently, multimedia Internet-based technologies have provided even more powerful options for teaching and learning at a distance. With virtually all schools now linked to the Internet, states, districts, and individual schools are increasingly adopting online courses to expand their curricula.

The appeal of online courses is evident: they can increase the range of course offerings available to all students as well as provide educational access to special students (for example, homebound, incarcerated, and atypical students for whom regular classrooms are not effective). In addition, they provide an alternative method of instruction, one that adults are increasingly using

for both professional and personal development. The number of students participating in online courses is large and growing dramatically. One estimate is that 30,000 high school students have taken an online course¹ and that another 25,000 students are enrolled in teacher-led online courses this academic year alone. When all kinds of online courses or online options are considered, the number enrolled may be closer to 50,000 or even 100,000. It is estimated that by 2006, a majority of high school students will have had an online course before graduating.²

Why focus on high school courses?

By addressing quality measures for online courses offered to high school (grades 9-12) students, this document fills a particular void. Higher education courses and programs have a longer track record and a different set of purposes, administrative practices, and audiences. The characteristics of effective online courses at the college level have recently been identified in such documents as the National Education Association's *Quality on the Line*³ and the American Federation of Teachers' *Distance Education: Guidelines for Good Practice*.⁴ While some of these characteristics also apply to online courses in a high school

¹ Ball, M., "For an Online High School, the Future Draws Near," *The Washington Post*, August 23, 2001, p. H19.

² Rose, R., Director, Concord Consortium, presentation to "Linking Leadership to Learning: Putting PT3 Results to Work," Vanderbilt University, October 20-22, 2001.

³ Phipps, R., Merisotis, J. and Harvey, M. (2000). *Quality On the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Learning*. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Higher Education Policy. www.ihep.org/quality.pdf.

⁴ Higher Education Program and Policy Council. (2001). *Distance Education: Guidelines for Good Practice*. Washington, D.C.: American Federation of Teachers. www.aft.org/higher_ed/technology.

environment, to be effective there, online courses must address the unique social, educational, and emotional needs of high school students. Since additional limitations and concerns may arise when a significant portion of a high school student's coursework is completed online, we are only establishing criteria for individual courses and not examining online programs that serve as the bulk of a student's education.

Another area that raises a series of difficult questions is the appropriateness of online education for younger students. Again, while there are many technical and management issues that cross over and apply to online courses for all age levels, too many important differences exist to automatically apply our criteria in that setting. The research base for online courses and educational programs offered to preschool, elementary school, and middle school students is extremely limited. Our current understanding of the characteristics and needs of learners in earlier grades, however, would suggest we exercise great caution in the use of the online environment to deliver instruction to students prior to middle school.

Why are standards needed for online learning?

We know that technology can help remove geography and economics as barriers to high educational achievement for every child. Today's challenge is to ensure that information technology increases the quantity of educational opportunities *while maintaining or enhancing the quality of those opportunities*. Growing experience and analysis of online learning are revealing that new forms of delivery require new quality criteria. Most of our standards for the delivery of instruction

never contemplated these new communications tools. Standards and methods that have been studiously crafted to instruct students in physical classrooms cannot simply be double-clicked into an online environment. Our aim in preparing these guidelines is to provide a practical tool to help students, parents, educators, and policymakers create, use, and assess online courses. Our knowledge and savvy in navigating the many online programs available must evolve as quickly as these offerings do. We must make wise decisions in determining when and how to use online education.

Most school districts and states have adopted content standards for their students. While these can be applied to both conventional and online programs, they are insufficient guidelines for implementing online programs. Shoehorning content created for conventional classrooms into online delivery will diminish the overall quality of education.

It is also important that standards evolve with new goals and opportunities. New skill sets are needed for success in today's information age. These 21st century learning skills have been variously defined⁵ as:

- Basic, Scientific, and Technological Literacy
- Visual and Information Literacy
- Cultural Literacy and Global Awareness
- Adaptability/Managing Complexity
- Curiosity, Creativity, and Risk Taking
- Higher Order Thinking and Sound Reasoning
- Teaming, Collaboration, and Interpersonal Skills
- Personal and Social Responsibility
- Interactive Communication

⁵ CEO Forum on Education and Technology. (2001). *Key Building Blocks for Student Achievement in the 21st Century*, Washington, D.C.: CEO Forum; Lemke, C. (2000) *enGauge: 21st Century Skills*. Oak Brook, IL; North Central Regional Educational Laboratory. <http://engage.ncrel.org>; Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, U.S. Department of Labor (1991). *What Work Requires of Schools. A SCANS Report for America, 2000*.

- Prioritizing, Planning, and Managing for Results
- Effective Use of Real-World Tools
- Production of Relevant, High Quality Products

It is particularly important that educators use tools of the information age—including online courses—to build information age skills and understandings.

Goals for This Document

We believe the standards set forth in this document will facilitate and expand the use of online programs by equipping all those involved in education to make decisions regarding quality online courses. Specifically, we believe that:

- States must determine guidelines for the creation and use of online courses for students within their jurisdiction.
- Local school districts must identify their own goals in using online programs and must have tools to assess their appropriateness and effectiveness.

- Teachers must know what constitutes quality in online teaching and to what standards they will be held accountable.
- Parents must understand how online education functions and how to ascertain what is in the best interest of students.
- Students must become informed consumers, aware of how online courses can enhance their educational portfolios, and what is required for success in these courses.
- Developers and providers of online education must meet identified standards to ensure delivery of high quality, relevant, and effective resources in the education marketplace.

We expect these criteria may flex and develop as we learn more, and as information technology functions grow and change. Information technology in education is in its embryonic stages, and these criteria should be a supple, developing tool as we steer through these exhilarating but challenging times.



SECTION II

Checklists for Various Constituencies



Each constituent in the online education process (policymakers, administrators, teachers, parents, and students) must consider a number of important issues when contemplating creating, adopting, administering, or participating in online courses. The checklists that follow are designed to help each constituency ask the right questions.

Questions for Policymakers

Planning for and managing online courses

- Are a process and criteria in place for determining when to use online courses? For example, will online courses be used to address gaps in course offerings, to enrich the curriculum, to give students greater flexibility in scheduling, to assist underserved students, to replace existing face-to-face instruction, or some combination of the above? How do these differing goals affect planning for online education?
- Is online instruction aligned with the overall vision for student learning and achievement?

- Are there procedures for ensuring that online courses and other instructional resources are aligned with state/district academic standards, curriculum frameworks, and assessments?
- Is there a process to decide when to develop courses and when to purchase them? Is there a funding system in place for development and distribution of courses? How will fees be determined for making courses available to students out of the jurisdiction?
- If districts offer courses, will the state establish policies and procedures for overseeing implementation?
- If the courses are provided by the state, will funding for courses come from the state budget or from individual school districts via course tuition? Will students be able to enroll directly, or will they go through their local districts?
- Will home schoolers and private school students be permitted to enroll in online courses, and if so, will they enroll directly or through a school district? Who will assume the cost?
- Who is responsible for ensuring that students have convenient access to the necessary equipment, software, connections, and other resources needed to make best use of instructional technologies? Do these

assurances and payments also cover costs associated with home schooling and private school participation?

- Do current seat time mandates support the use of online courses, or do they need to be revised?
- Are there procedures for reviewing, evaluating, and updating policies related to online education?

Personnel questions

- Will online courses be led by local or within-state certified teachers, or by teachers certified outside the state? If courses come from outside vendors, will the courses be delivered by local or in-state faculty, or by instructors provided by outside vendors?
- Is there a process to ensure the preparedness of instructors to teach online?
- Are there a plan and budget in place to ensure consistent support and professional development for online educators?
- Who monitors and evaluates the online teacher? Do contractual or other personnel safeguards apply?
- Do employment policies provide sufficient flexibility to allow such practices as flextime and working from home?
- Do compensation and preparation time for educators adequately reflect the demands of developing and delivering online courses?
- Will on-site staff be provided to mentor students enrolled in off-site online courses and, if so, must they be teachers?

- Are intellectual property rights to online courses assigned?

Quality control questions

- Have adequate resources been allotted for comprehensive technical support to educators and students?
- Do regulations aimed at oversight of charter schools adequately ensure instructional quality when instruction is provided online?
- Are there procedures in place at the state/district levels to assess and rate online courses and other resources and ensure their sources are properly accredited?
- Should course evaluations be made public?
- Are there accountability measures in place to identify effective instructional practices and discourage ineffective ones, both among online course providers and on-site educators?

Student enrollment and credit questions

- Should notification and approval of parents/guardians be required before students are allowed to enroll in online courses?
- Will online courses be granted the same credit and value as face-to-face courses?
- Will there be limits on the number of online courses in which a student may enroll? Can a full diploma be earned online?

- Can students elect to take an online course when a comparable course is available at their school?
- Can a student be required to take an online course when other options are available (for example, taking the course at a later date or nearby school) or when discipline or other problems make participating in the face-to-face course problematic?
- Should there be minimum qualifications (age, teacher recommendations, grades) for student participation in an online course?



Questions for Online Teachers

Teachers of online courses are confronted with a wide range of considerations that affect their work. These cover the gamut of pedagogy, curriculum, assessment, personal style, hardware and software considerations, availability of resources, etc. Teachers should consider these issues as they decide whether they should instruct online, or as they prepare for work in the online environment. Those responsible for administering the implementation of online programs also need to consider these questions in order to design effective learning environments, provide necessary support to teachers, and establish reasonable workloads for the teacher.

- Am I ready to teach online? What do I need to know and how can I learn this prior to teaching online?
- Do I have access to computers, Internet connections, and other resources necessary for teaching a course online? Will the school provide me with necessary access and support?

- Will this change what I teach and how I teach? Can I participate in the development of the curriculum? What is “academic freedom” in the online world? Am I required to use lessons that are designed by others for the online environment? How will the online environment affect my style of communication with students?
- How will this change my assessment of student learning? What kind of authentic performance works online? How can I ensure that the student is doing his/her own work?
- What are the students’ rights and responsibilities for online classes? Are there consequences for inappropriate behavior or academic impropriety? Is there an appeal process for students who believe they have been treated unfairly? Are there criteria (such as level of participation) that may affect grading regardless of how students perform on authentic assessments? Do students have access to counseling and other support services beyond what I can offer them?
- How will this change the way I interact with parents/guardians? Will I be able to contact my students’ parents/guardians when needed or on an ongoing basis?
- What kinds of support structures will be in place to assist me to:
 - ☐ work with the technology?
 - ☐ accommodate individual student needs (particularly students with special needs)?
 - ☐ enhance my professional skills?
 - ☐ collaborate with colleagues?

- How will teaching online change the way I am evaluated? Will administrators at other sites have access to my online class and interactions with my students and will they evaluate me? What standards will be used for my evaluation?
- What contractual rights and protections will I have?
- How will this affect my overall workload? Will adjustments be made in my other teaching assignments in order to accommodate the workload?
- How will I be compensated for my work? Is there recognition of advanced degrees, years of experience, special skills, or other criteria, or do all online educators receive a flat rate?
- Who owns the lesson materials and teaching ideas I use online? Will I be compensated if others use my designs and ideas or if they are marketed by the “provider”?



Questions for Managers and Administrators of Online Courses

Managers and administrators of online learning programs must consider many of the same issues confronting policymakers and teachers. Managers must ensure availability of adequate resources, reasonable workloads, and ongoing professional support for the practitioners. They must also implement teacher evaluation in a manner that

fosters professional growth and supports decisions about teaching assignments. In addition to the practitioner issues, the following are some considerations for the administrator responsible for managing implementation of an online program:

- Do all students have convenient access to the necessary equipment software, connections, and other resources needed to make best use of instructional technologies? Does the school have consistent and adequate access to the Internet?
- Will students be provided computers to use at home, or provided computer time at school to participate in online courses?
- Is on-site teaching staff assigned to (1) mentor students taking courses online, and (2) act as school liaisons with the off-site provider?
- Can school schedules accommodate online courses?
- How do students with special needs (disability, language, or setting) gain access to the benefits of online courses and other instructional resources in ways equivalent to other students?
- Is training/orientation given to school administrators to prepare them for new management challenges related to administering online courses and helping students select and participate in them? Do parents of students taking online courses receive appropriate information? Do they know to whom they should address concerns about the online course? Can they “look over their child’s shoulder” online to stay informed about the course, and contact the online teacher as needed?

- Does the grading process for the online course meet the needs of the school?
- Does the registration process for the online course meet the needs of the school?
- Do school administrators have a means of communicating concerns/issues to the online course provider?



Questions for Parents/Guardians

Parents and guardians may be uncomfortable or confused when first considering online courses for their children. The same principles should apply in terms of their oversight of their children's education as in a face-to-face teaching environment, but in online learning there are additional questions to ask the school, their child, and themselves. Parents and guardians should learn as much as possible about the course, teacher, requirements, and supports so they can ensure that the courses provide quality learning experiences for their children.

- Do I know as much about this course as I would know about the one offered in my child's school, for example, teacher's background, prerequisites, syllabus, workload, credit, and transferability options?
- Is there an evaluation of this course and teacher that I can review?
- Does my child have ready access to computers, Internet connections, and other resources necessary for taking a course online? Will the school provide adequate access and support?

- Does my child have the maturity, time, workload management, and technology skills required to take on an online course? Will I be able to give him/her the support needed to ensure success, for example, computer time at home or after school for work on online activities, oversight, encouragement, and support beyond that which is normally required?
- Do I know how to access the counseling, guidance, and technical support services my child may need as a participant in an online course?
- Do I know how to contact the online teacher with my concerns and questions?
- Is there a parental rights and responsibilities statement pertaining to online courses?



Questions for Students

Students should become informed consumers, learning as much as they can ahead of time regarding the online course and its requirements. Students will need to prepare themselves to take on the additional responsibilities required to be successful in the new environment of online coursework.

- Do I know as much about this course as I would know about the one offered in my school, for example, the teacher's background, prerequisites, syllabus, workload, credit, and transferability options?
- Is there an evaluation of this course and teacher that I can review?

- Do I have ready access to computers, Internet connections, and other resources necessary for taking a course online? Will the school provide me adequate access and support?
- Do I have the maturity, time, workload management skills, and other skills needed to take on an online course? Do I first need to be trained technologically? Is this part of the course? Will I be able to devote the extra effort needed to ensure my success. For example, will I have computer time at home or after school for work on online activities, even if this conflicts with sports or extracurricular activities?
- Do I know how to access the counseling, guidance, and technical support services I may need as a participant in an online course?
- Do I know how to contact the teacher with my concerns and questions?
- Is there a student rights and responsibilities statement pertaining to online courses?
- Do I have sufficient support, both in staff and resources, from my on-site school?



A User's Guide to Online Courses

Introduction

Clearly, online courses are much like face-to-face courses in that they must meet the highest standards of quality design and instruction. But because the online environment is a relatively new one for teaching and learning, it is important to recognize and explicitly describe key features that should be considered when this form of instruction is adopted. The quality of online course offerings should be considered in terms of the following areas:

1. **Curriculum**—Online curricular offerings should be challenging, relevant, and aligned with appropriate national, state, and/or district standards for student learning.
2. **Instructional Design**—Online courses should be informed by and reflect the most current research on learning theory. They should be designed to take advantage of the special circumstances, requirements, and opportunities of the online learning environment and support the development of 21st century learning skills.
3. **Teacher Quality**—Teachers should be skilled in the subject matter, learning theory, technologies, and teaching pedagogies appropriate for the content area and the online environment.
4. **Student Roles**—Students should be actively engaged in the learning process and interact on a regular basis with the teacher and online classmates in the course.

5. **Assessment**—Assessment should be authentic, formative, and regular, providing opportunities for students to reflect on their own learning and work quality during the course. End-of-course assessments should give students the opportunity to demonstrate appropriate skills and understandings that reflect mastery of the course content.

6. **Management and Support Systems**—The course should be managed to ensure effective student and school participation. Support systems should provide resources to teachers, students, and parents comparable to those provided by face-to-face courses, as well as special support necessitated by the unique circumstances of the online environment.

7. **Technological Infrastructure**—Finally, the technical infrastructure supporting the online course should provide the necessary tools for instruction and interactivity. The technology behind the course should work reliably, simply, and economically. Technical assistance should be available whenever needed by students or teachers.

The following charts provide greater detail about each of these seven categories. They are meant to provide guidance both for those who design online courses and those who evaluate the quality of existing courses. The following indicators may be more easily applicable to some situations and courses than others. They are intended to provide a comprehensive framework for analysis.



Online curricular offerings should be challenging, relevant, and aligned with appropriate national, state, and/or district standards for student learning.

Curriculum

	NOT EVIDENT (1)	(2)	(3)	FULLY EVIDENT (4)
The online course is aligned with appropriate national, state and/or district standards for student learning.				
Student performance (learning) objectives are clearly stated.				
The performance objectives are clearly matched to the national, state, and/or district standards for the corresponding content area(s).				
The performance objectives are matched to the developmental/grade level of the intended student population.				
The performance objectives are articulated within a multi-levelled scope and sequence so students are adequately prepared for the next level of study.				
Assignments, projects, tests, and other artifacts of student work clearly reflect the desired performance outcomes for the course.				
Interdisciplinary content and activities are encouraged.				
The course contextualizes evaluated learning through links to at least two additional knowledge domains.				
The course provides an appropriate balance of exposure to a range of topics and deeper exploration of selected topics for student mastery.				
Even if intended as a survey course, the syllabus encourages in-depth exploration and analysis.				

Instructional Design

Online courses should be informed by and reflect the most current research on learning theory. They should be designed to take advantage of the special circumstances, requirements, and opportunities of an online learning environment and support the development of 21st century learning skills.

	NOT EVIDENT (1)	(2)	(3)	FULLY EVIDENT (4)
The course makes maximum use of the online medium by incorporating primary source materials, media, outside experts, and resources beyond the geography and culture of the students' brick-and-mortar classroom experience.				
Students interact with a variety of media and resources.				
The course includes resources and links to resources from outside the students' familiar culture and immediate geography.				
The course schedule includes a variety of activities, both online and offline.				
The course facilitates learning from multiple viewpoints.				
The course supports different learning styles of students.				
Students are assigned relevant readings from appropriate print and/or Web media.				
Students deepen an understanding of content through such activities as lab experiments, product design, and other hands-on activities.				
Students use writing to reflect on readings, projects, labs, and other assignments.				

Instructional Design

	NOT EVIDENT (1)	(2)	(3)	FULLY EVIDENT (4)
The course fosters the development of "Information Literacy" skills.				
Activities require students to use appropriate research strategies for finding appropriate online content.				
Students use strategies for evaluating the quality and credibility of web-based materials used in the online course.				
Issues of copyright, intellectual property, online privacy, and protection are addressed.				
The course fosters the development of communication skills and the ability to collaborate online.				
Students participate in online group activities.				
The course includes regular, sustained, and guided student-to-student discussion and collaboration.				
Student assignments include opportunities for multimedia presentations, products, and reports.				

Teacher Quality

Online teachers should be skilled in the subject matter, learning theory, technology use, and teaching pedagogies appropriate to the content area and the online environment.

	NOT EVIDENT (1)	(2)	(3)	FULLY EVIDENT (4)
The online teacher has expertise in the subject matter being taught.				
The online teacher is formally prepared in the subject matter being taught.				
The online teacher is familiar with applicable state and national standards and curriculum for the content being taught.				
The online teacher provides appropriate connections between course content, other curricular areas, and the real world.				
The online teacher utilizes effective teaching techniques.				
The online teacher is licensed in the discipline in which he or she is teaching the course.				
The online teacher utilizes effective strategies, matched to the content being taught, including methods for supporting inquiry, analysis, and synthesis of content.				
The online teacher applies a variety of instructional strategies to meet individual students' needs.				
The online teacher monitors student understanding and adjusts instruction to enable learning.				

Teacher Quality

	NOT EVIDENT (1)	(2)	(3)	FULLY EVIDENT (4)
The online teacher has frequent and timely interactions with students in the course.				
The online teacher monitors student postings of work and discussions on a regular basis.				
The online teacher provides appropriate feedback, guidance, and direction and responds to student inquiries within 24 hours (Mon.-Fri.).				
The online teacher models personal attributes that support a learning environment.				
The online teacher sets clear expectations and assumes a shared responsibility with the student to ensure that learning occurs.				
The online teacher's interactions with students, families, and communities are respectful and appropriate.				
The online teacher has been trained to teach online.				
The online teacher has received training in online teaching that includes strategies for engaging and involving students in the online environment, appropriate use of online "voice," use of the technology involved, and the ability to access the support systems available to students and teachers.				

Student Role

Students in the online course should be actively engaged in the learning process and interact on a regular basis with the teacher and online classmates.

	NOT EVIDENT (1)	(2)	(3)	FULLY EVIDENT (4)
Students are active participants in a learning community based on student-to-student as well as student-to-teacher discussions.				
Students post questions and respond to the comments and questions of other students on a regular basis.				
Student discussions with classmates are under the guidance of teachers who raise the level and broaden the scope of discussions.				
Student/teacher dialogue is encouraged throughout the course.				
Discussion areas are clearly designed for communications among students, as are sites for private student/teacher interactions.				
Students' collaborative skills and teamwork are emphasized.				
Students participate in team-based assignments and projects, as appropriate.				
Students have adequate time to work in online groups.				
Students are encouraged to develop time-management and organizational skills.				
Assignments are structured to require consistent efforts from students throughout the term.				
Expectations are made clear to students with respect to minimum amounts of time per week needed for online interactions, study, and homework assignments.				
Engaged learning, self-direction, and development of critical thinking skills are emphasized.				
Students engage in self-reflection, self-assessment, and evaluation as part of course work.				

Assessment should be authentic, formative, and regular, providing opportunities for students to reflect on their own learning and work quality during the course. End-of-course assessments should give students the opportunity to demonstrate appropriate skills and understandings that reflect mastery of the course content.

Assessment

	NOT EVIDENT (1)	(2)	(3)	FULLY EVIDENT (4)
The online course clearly describes how student performance will be assessed.				
Students are given criteria regarding the performance indicators of the course.				
The scoring rubric is made available so that all assessment criteria are available to the student.				
The course syllabus lists all required assignments, the weights given to each, due dates, and penalties for late submissions.				
Authenticity of student work is verified by appropriate means.				
Student learning is assessed on an ongoing basis and through a variety of methods.				
Students are assessed by several different methods over the duration of the online course including such measures as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributions and responses to online discussions • Completion of online assignments • Portfolio submissions • Special projects and/or presentations • Creation of authentic products • Tests and quizzes 				
The online teacher provides fair, accurate, and timely assessment of student work.				
Students receive continual, timely, and constructive feedback on the quality of their work and mastery of course content.				
Students actively participate in evaluating their own work.				

Management and Support Systems

The course should be managed to ensure effective student and school participation. Support systems should provide comparable resources to teachers, students, and parents that would accompany face-to-face courses, as well as special supports necessitated by the special circumstances of the online environment.

	NOT EVIDENT (1)	(2)	(3)	FULLY EVIDENT (4)
The online course is clear in its description of learning objectives, work required, and prerequisite skills or courses necessary for success.				
The course description is available to students and parents/guardians before registering.				
The description includes specific examples of course objectives, issues, concepts, and ideas that are covered in the course, in order to deepen student and parent understanding.				
Technical requirements for acceptable access are clearly stated.				
The online course provides the necessary registration, grading, and other administrative systems to facilitate student participation in the course.				
Individual course/career counseling is available to advise students about enrollment and participation in the online course, including assessments or counseling regarding the self-motivation and commitment necessary for success in an online learning environment.				
The school or school district where a student is enrolled or resides accepts the course for credit.				
Procedures for fees and payments are established and agreed upon by all parties before students enroll in a course.				
The academic calendar of the students and teacher is coordinated before the course begins.				

Management and Support Systems

	NOT EVIDENT (1)	(2)	(3)	FULLY EVIDENT (4)
A professional support system is in place to ensure teacher success in delivering the online course.				
Teachers are provided professional development opportunities to assist them in improving their online teaching.				
Teachers have access to a network of other online practitioners to discuss pedagogical and curricular issues.				
Teacher evaluation is conducted in a manner that encourages growth and complies with contractual agreements.				
Course resources are available to support student success.				
A course orientation program or service exists for students.				
Students can access all ancillary materials necessary for the course.				
Students receive training and information to aid them in navigating the online environment and securing material through electronic databases, interlibrary loans, government archives, news services, etc.				

Management and Support Systems

	NOT EVIDENT (1)	(2)	(3)	FULLY EVIDENT (4)
Student rights and responsibilities are recognized and upheld within the course structure.				
Students and parents/guardians sign an agreement on rights and responsibilities in the online course.				
Policies and systems are in place to address student complaints, appeals, and/or recourse if the online course is not delivered as described.				
A system is in place to deal with inappropriate student behavior and issues of discipline.				
A secure grading system is provided, with opportunities for students, parents/guardians, and school administrators to review grades as appropriate.				
Confidential management of student records for documentation of student achievement in each course is provided.				
The course is evaluated on a regular basis and improvements are made based on those evaluations.				
Students provide feedback about the quality of the course content, instruction, support systems, and infrastructure.				
Teachers provide feedback about the course content, support systems, and infrastructure.				
Feedback from students and teachers is utilized to make improvements and revisions in the course.				
Information on student completion rates is part of the course evaluation.				

The technical infrastructure supporting the online course should provide the necessary tools for instruction and interactivity. The technology behind the course should work reliably, simply, and effectively. Technical assistance should be available whenever needed by students or teachers.

Technical Infrastructure

	NOT EVIDENT (1)	(2)	(3)	FULLY EVIDENT (4)
The online platform provides necessary resources for effective delivery of the course.				
The online platform used for course delivery has the necessary system capacity to support the learning activities of the course.				
The online platform provides necessary tools for administrative functions such as enrollment, grading, maintenance of student records, and storage of student work.				
The online platform provides appropriate tools for communication and collaboration.				
The course provider provides a clear description of the system's technical requirements.				
Adequate and timely support is available to the teacher and students when technical issues arise.				
The course contains instructions on how to access technical information or post technical questions within the online course.				
Students and teachers receive timely (within 24 hours) and user-friendly responses to technical questions.				
Equipment for student involvement is adequate and meets universal service standards for students with special needs.				
Students have access to appropriate hardware and software on a regular and convenient basis.				
Connection speeds are sufficient for communication and accessing all course materials.				



References and Resources List

Ball, M. (2001). "For an Online High School, the Future Draws Near," *Washington Post*. Aug. 23, 2001, page T19. www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A47115-2001Aug22.html.

CEO Forum on Education and Technology (2001). *School Technology and Readiness Report: Year Four*. Washington, D.C.: CEO Forum on Education and Technology. www.ceoforum.org.

Clark, T. (2000). *Virtual High Schools: State of the States: A Study of Virtual High School Planning and Operation in the United States*. Macomb, Ill.: Western Illinois University, Center for the Application of Information Technologies. www.cait.org/shared_resource_docs/vhs_files?vhs_study.pdf.

Collison, G., Elbaum, B., Haavind, S., & Tinker, R. (2001). *Facilitating Online Learning: Effective Strategies for Moderators*. Concord, Mass.: The Concord Consortium. <http://concord.org/publications/fol/>.

Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, *Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certification Programs*. www.neasc.org/cihe/best_practices_electronically_offered_degree.html.

Distance Learning Resource Network. www.dlrn.org/virtual.html.

Higher Education Program and Policy Council (2001). *Distance Education: Guidelines for Good Practice*. Washington, D.C.: American Federation of Teachers. www.aft.org/higher_ed/technology.

National Association of State Boards of Education (2001). *Any Time, Any Place, Any Path, Any Pace: Taking the Lead on e-Learning Policy*. Alexandria, Va.: National Association of State Boards of Education. www.nasbe.org.

National Education Association, "Distance Education: Quality Checklist." www.nea.org/cet/briefs/16.html.

Office of Technology Assessment, U.S. Congress (1989). *Linking for Learning: A New Course for Education*. OTA-SET-430. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office). www.ota.nap.edu.

Phipps, R., Merisotis, J., & Harvey, M. (2000). *Quality On the Line: Benchmarks for Success in Internet-based Distance Learning*. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Higher Education Policy. www.ihep.org/quality.pdf.

Southern Regional Education Board, Educational Technology Cooperative. *Essential Principles of Quality: Guidelines for Web-based Courses for Middle and High School*. www.sreb.org/programs/edtech/pubs/EssentialPrincipals/EssentialPrinciples.pdf.

Trotter, A. (2001). "Cyber Learning at Online High." Education Week on the Web. Jan. 24, 2001. www.edweek.org/ew/ewstory.cfm?slug=19online.h2o.

Vail, K. (2001). "Online Learning Grows Up: No Longer an Experiment, Virtual Schooling Is Here to Stay," *Electronic School*. Sept. 2001. www.electronicschool.com/2001/09/0901fl.html.

VHS NetCourse Evaluation Board, Hudson, Mass., Public Schools and the Concord Consortium, "NetCourse Evaluation Standards," [vhs.concord.org/Pages/Main+Office-Course+Evaluations+\(FA-Semester\)](http://vhs.concord.org/Pages/Main+Office-Course+Evaluations+(FA-Semester)).

Web-based Education Commission. (2000). *The Power of the Internet for Learning: Moving from Promise to Practice*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education. www.webcommission.org.

Acknowledgements

This document was the result of the collaboration among a number of organizations concerned with ensuring the provision of quality online courses to high school students throughout the country. Representatives of these organizations contributed generously of their time and expertise in the production of this guide. Those individuals and their organizational affiliations are listed below:

Jim Bogden
Staff to E-Learning Task Force
National Association of State Boards of Education

Art Sheekey
Project Director
CNA Corporation

Steve Kohn
Director, Strategic Alliances-Education/Disabilities
Verizon Communications

Barbara Stein
Senior Policy Analyst
National Education Association

Hilary LaMonte
Director, Educational Services
National School Boards Association

Blake West
Vice-President
Kansas-NEA

Liz R. Pape
Chief Executive Officer,
Virtual High School, Inc.

Geannie Wells
Director, Center for Accountability Solutions
American Association of School Administrators

James Schnitz
Global Educational Strategy Executive
IBM Corporation



NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
External Partnerships and Advocacy

1201 16th St., N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20036-3290

(202)822-7354

www.nea.org

www.nea.org/technology/distanceed/highschool